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CRITICISMS AND DISCUSSIONS.

IN HOW FAR WAS BEL THE CHRIST OF ANCIENT TIMES?

Whoever has had any acquaintance with Dr. Radau and his writings need scarcely be told that his little book, *Bel, the Christ of Ancient Times*,* like his other works, is packed to overflowing with Sumerian grammatical criticism and information and is, on that account alone of value to any student of that cryptic and most ancient of languages. We will grant indeed that he is one of the greatest, perhaps even *the* greatest living authority upon it.

Yet the title is perhaps misleading to many prospective readers. For such may possibly imagine that the intention is to prove the Christ of Catholic belief merely a latter-day replica of Bel, the heathen god, long outworn!

But the object is widely different. And while we may not follow the author in many of his arguments, yet the general conclusion is the by no means startling one, that the men of ancient Babylon felt the very human need for comfort and hope amid the ever present grim facts of suffering and death, and thus created for themselves in their own image, as they must needs have done, a redeemer who should conquer death and hell and bring to weary souls redemption and immortality.

This, we say, is both as it should be and as it must be in all ages and among all races. The Egyptians had Osiris, their suffering redeemer. Greece and Rome had the Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries and Mithras. The Aztecs, the Incas, and the primitive American Indians all had quite similar faiths. And were we to hereafter discover a hitherto unknown hyperborean race, we may be confident that whatever philosophy and religion they may have created, will be along these age old lines. For its roots lie, ineradicably, in the fundamental needs and aspirations of man.

* Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1908.

And it is a familiar commonplace of Catholic theology, that it was this universal desire for and expectation of the Man-God Redeemer, that imperatively demanded and necessitated its fulfilment in the Incarnation of Him, who was "the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world"; and the "Desire of all nations." So that here as in lesser cases prophecy, whether heathen or "revealed," was merely insight into what by dire necessity had to be. And Christianity, therefore, is not, as Puritanism heretically conceived, an artificial "scheme of salvation," foisted upon an unwilling and utterly alien world. But is, on the contrary, the *Catholic faith*, which summarizes, completes, and makes secure all the various partial broken insights and wavering desires for good, in the heathen religions and philosophies; which heathen faiths are indeed, by their very nature, nothing more than the instinctive gropings of men after truth and God, if "haply they might find Him." They had faults and defects; unquestionably, many and obvious. But these, in nearly every case, were simply the defects of imperfect insight springing from the unavoidable limitations imposed by racial capabilities and environment. In short, they were "right in their assertions, but wrong in their negations." So that Christianity comes, as the Catholic faith, not to destroy, but to *fulfil*,—and to fulfil not merely Judaism, but all the other ethnic beliefs; and only supersedes, because it so fulfils.

Hence, not only Bel but all the gods of the elder world were in a very real sense the "Christs" of their several times. And, in each and every case, much of their mythology and doctrines can be paralleled by something in Christianity,—indeed, must be paralleled, if that is to be the final truth.

But to turn this the wrong way about as some may seek to do, and claim that Christianity is therefore nothing better than a revamped Babylonianism, or Buddhism, or Parseeism, as the case may be, is surely to woefully misread the story! It is quite as if some one claimed that the events in American history were by no means new, but were word for word, and act for act, not merely similar in some respects to, but identical replicas of the words and events in Babylonia 8000 years ago!

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